



## RIDING WITH *Synchronicity*

### The Importance of the Rising Trot and How to Ride it.

**The rising trot, along with the walk, will be the gait that is most beneficial for exercising horses to develop them mentally, emotionally and physically. Mentally and emotionally the walk and the trot are calming. For some horses with a tendency towards impulsiveness, maintaining the trot teaches them the discipline to stay in control of their emotions rather than letting their emotions run away with them which means that their body will soon be following.**

For the horse physically, the amount of strength and push from the hindquarters needed for the trot are not nearly as demanding as that required for a well balanced canter. So for horses that are not able to use their hindquarters as much as they should the canter is too physically hard. They will simply be pulling themselves along with their front end as that is the only way that they can do it. The more that horses continue to pull themselves along with the front end the more they will continue to stress and injure their bodies.

It will be in the rising trot rather than the sitting trot that the rider can encourage the horse to start lifting his hack and thereby begin using the hindquarters more. For a more detailed explanation of the biomechanics of the horse see the article 'Changing Body Patterns and

Learning Riding Dynamics' on my webiste; [www.melfleming.com.au](http://www.melfleming.com.au)

In the rising trot the horse experiences a moment where the rider is up off their back so it provides a bigger invitation for the horse to lift his back up under the rider. In the sitting trot most riders will not be mobile enough through their hips, pelvis and lower back to go with the horse and thus will be inhibiting the horse's movement causing the back to flatten and hollow. It can take some time to develop the ability to be able to ride the sitting trot in a way that is helpful for horses.

#### **Riding Dynamics and Balance for the Rising Trot.**

Knowing that the essential ingredient for the horse to be in balance, able to use his hindquarters and reach through under his belly with his hind legs is the ability to lift his back, then this must be the basis for all of the principles involved with riding dynamics.

The rising trot is the one time in riding where the rider's hips and pelvis do the same thing at the same time. That means both sides of the pelvis and both hips go up and down at the same time. They do not have the same 'independent suspension' as needed for

the walk, sitting trot and canter. For a more detailed explanation of this see the article 'Riding in Synchronicity' on my website; [www.melfleming.com.au](http://www.melfleming.com.au)

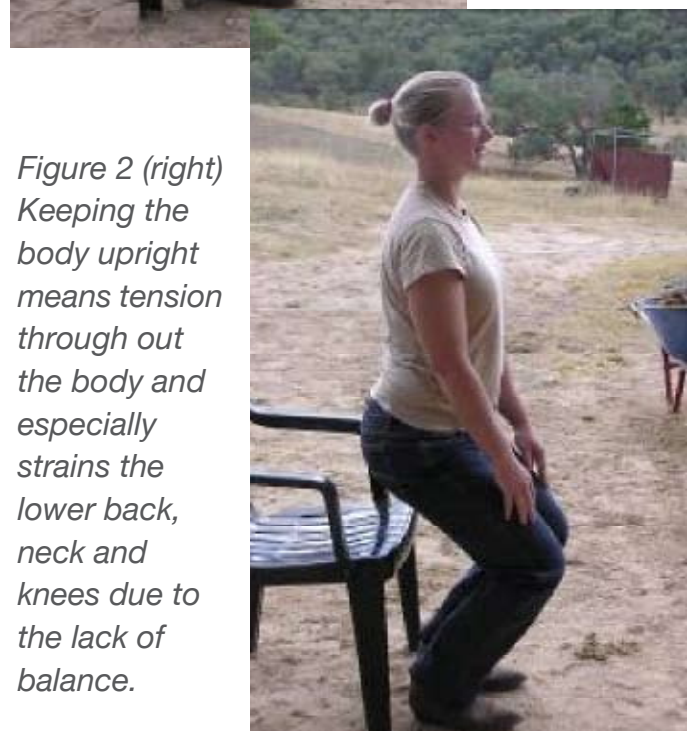
The reason for this difference is that in the rising trot you are only riding (or you could say rising) with one hind leg instead of following the action of both of the horse's hind legs alternately.

However the rising trot is not about just about going up and down it is also about moving the hips forward and back. The rising trot is an action of opening the hip joints and moving them up and forward and then closing the hip joints as the seat moves down and back. The longer the horse's stride with the hind legs the more forward the riders hips will have to travel and this is how at a later stage you can influence a horse to reach more with the hind legs, but first you must just get in harmony with what your horse offers.

The rider's upper body needs to be inclined forward as the rider moves in between the sit phase and the rise phase. The degree of this forward incline is dependent upon many factors for example the speed, terrain, balance of the horse, length of stirrup, length of stride etc so you will just have to experiment to find where feels the most balanced and effortless. The shoulders and the hips need to be always counterbalancing each other.



*Figure 1 (left)  
Allowing the upper body to incline forward means staying in balance and moving with ease.*



*Figure 2 (right)  
Keeping the body upright means tension through out the body and especially strains the lower back, neck and knees due to the lack of balance.*

## Here is an experiment that you can try.

Experiment with moving between sitting down and standing up from a chair. Do it slower than you would usually do it so you have time to notice what is happening in your body. You will notice that it is easier and with much less strain on your body, especially your knees and thighs, when you incline the upper body forward to get up as compared with keeping the upper body on the vertical with the shoulders remaining aligned straight over the hips. When moving feels easy it means that the body is in balance and therefore there is no unnecessary muscle strain or tension. This is the same balance that you need when rising to the trot.

A good way to help you find this balance if you have trouble with it while on the horse is to touch the mane or the neck just in front of the wither with your finger tips. While ever you can still touch you will not be able to fall back behind the movement and balance of the horse. This is also a good position in case you loose your balance as from there you can push down on the neck in order to regain your balance. This is much better than pulling on the reins, especially for your horse.

This technique of touching your horse on the neck is good to use no matter what level you are for situations where you could easily get out of balance. For example, I use it if I am riding a young horse that starts to get a bit tight and might spook or shy. When you push on the neck you can get the feeling that you are almost hovering over the horse rather than sitting down on them and your spine can become loose and agile so that you can have the best chance of going wherever they go, whether that is up, down, sideways or all those direction at once, which fortunately doesn't happen too often.

This technique of pushing on the neck is the opposite dynamic of grabbing the mane and pulling up on it or of pulling up on the front of the saddle. Pushing down softens the body and releases the riders legs, pulling up tightens the body and causes the rider to grip with the legs. Tension and gripping is not conducive to "stickabilty".

The rider must sit lightly and softly on the horse in the 'sit phase' to encourage the horse's back to come up underneath their seat. The rider's sternum should soften and sink down and back as their lower back lengthens and rounds ever so slightly. Note this is the lower back not the middle of the back that needs to slightly round, if the mid back were to round the rider's centre of balance would then be behind the motion and balance of the horse. I spend a lot of time with students in courses simulating the actions of the hip joint

opening and closing and the sternum softening and then lifting on the seat builder, gym balls and with various other body balancing exercises.



*Figure 3 - Mel riding Helium (photo by Coco)*

In the 'sit phase' of the rising trot at no time should the rider sit back with the upper body on the vertical and the shoulders directly over the hips. The rider merely touches down with the seat in the saddle, softens through the lower back and then waits for the horse to push him up gain for the next rise.

In the 'rising phase' the hips will travel forward as the shoulders travel backwards just like standing up from the chair. In this process the sternum will be raised up and forward and the lower back will ever so slightly arch.

The biggest key to all of this being successful is having a good base of support with the lower leg. The leg should be positioned so that the heel is under the hips and the shoulders when the rider is at the halt. The lower leg should then maintain this stable neutral position while the rest of the body goes through the motion of rising to the trot.

Again you can test this for yourself by sitting and standing up from a chair. Firstly have your feet directly underneath you with your heels

close to the front legs of the chair and then compare that with placing your feet out in front of you where you will find that it is very difficult to sit softly, slowly and balanced. The upper body becomes hard to control and the seat will 'fall' back.

This is very often the case with riders. The legs are too far forward so they sit heavily and bump the horse in the back causing the horse to hollow the back which is the opposite effect to what we are trying to achieve. If the lower leg is too far back the rider will be stiff, tipped forward and in front of the horse's balance which again restricts the horse and causes the rider to put too much weight on the horse's front end.



*Figure 5 (left) - Simulating the rising trot dynamics. Mel Fleming coaching Adele Calandra (photo by Greg Johnstone)*



*Figure 6 - More body balancing exercises and simulation on the seat builder. Elaine Delaney is the having a pretty good time on there by the look of it. (Photo by Greg Johnstone)*

The inside of the upper calf should be 'velcroed' metaphorically speaking, to the horse's ribcage saddle via the saddle flap, this will allow the knees to be soft. I like to think of it as velcro as it exemplifies a very secure connection without any force, gripping or squeezing. With this velcro connection your leg will go where ever the horse's ribcage goes in perfect harmony.

*Figure 7 (top next page) - Andi Neilson sitting in good alignment at the halt. The inside of the upper calf is 'velcroed' metaphorically speaking, to the horses sides, the sole of her boot is 'velcroed' to the stirrup and the stirrup is positioned across*



*Figure 4 (left) body balancing exercises on the gym balls at the recent "Ultimate Horsemanship Experience" at Moonbi NSW (photo by Greg Johnstone)*

*the ball of the foot with an even contact across the whole of the foot. The sole of the boot is basically parallel to the ground and the stirrup leather is hanging directly down from the stirrup bar. It is all looking pretty good for the lower leg being able to act as a secure base of support. (photo by Greg Johnstone)*



*Figure 8- (above) The proof is in the pudding. Andi now tests this lower leg position and it is all looking good in this 'sit phase' of the rising trot. There is softness and balance in the rider and the horse is starting to experiment with lifting the back. (photo by Greg Johnstone)*

The next part to think about is the feet in the stirrups. The sole of the boot should be basically parallel to the ground at all times. Your toes inside your boots should be spread wide apart and open rather than curled up tight. It is the ball of the foot, and I would even go as far to say it is the back of the ball of the foot, that feels a 'velcro' connection with the stirrup which means that there will be no downward pressure on the stirrup. Downward

pressure on the stirrup has a hollowing and restrictive effect on the horse's movement.

The contact with the stirrup iron should be equal between the inside of the foot and the outside of the foot. Just bringing your awareness to the connection between your foot and the stirrup and thinking about having that contact even across the whole foot will improve many things in the body. It will change the position of the hip joint in the hip socket which will affect the position of the pelvis in the saddle, upon which the whole of the upper body aligns itself. If the stirrup is positioned too far forward towards the toes it encourages the rider to tense the toes and this tension again extends all the way through the body.

Now here is a thought provoking concept for most of you. The weight in the stirrups should stay the same whether the rider is in the sit phase or the rise phase. "What?" you say. "How could you rise?" It is actually easy when you are in balance as described above. You can even rise trot bareback or without stirrups when you are in balance and you initiate the rise from some other part of your body. For example, initiate the movement with the opening and closing of the hip joint or the lifting and then softening of the sternum. One of the things that gives people away when they push down in the stirrups to rise is that their stirrups move down and out each time they rise rather than being still.

Let the horse push you up. A lot of times riders are anxious and in their impulsiveness they get ahead of the horse instead of waiting for the momentum of the horse to push them up. Also many riders rise way bigger than the horse is moving. If your horse is not trotting with a big stride the rise will be very small. Your seat may hardly leave the saddle. Sometimes it might be just your skeleton rising inside you skin!!! The secret is always to get in harmony and match you horse first, later you will feel when you can 'lead' the movement of the horse. So relax, breathe and wait for the horse's hind leg to push you up.

Breathing will be one of the greatest keys to improve your riding. If I was told that I could only give someone a single piece of advice to improve their riding or anything for that matter I would talk to them about breathing. So many riders hold their breath and don't breathe or else they breathe very shallowly.

There are many different breathing techniques around but a very old, tried and true breathing technique that you can use, is to breathe in through the nose and exhale out through the mouth. On the in breath you say the word "so" in your head and on the out breath you say the word "hum". Saying these words helps you focus on your breathing and helps to still the mind. Breathing in this way helps you find balance, lets go of stiffness and tension, quietens your mind and heightens your senses so you can think and feel clearly.



*Figure 7-photo by Greg Johnstone- Here the rider is out of balance. The legs are too far forward causing the rider to 'fall' back in the saddle rather than place the seat lightly in the saddle. The rider is too upright for this 'sit phase' and is behind the movement of the horse. This means that it will then take a big effort to rise because of the lack of balance. The effect that it has on the horse is that the horse's back flattens, the hinds legs can't step through underneath and the head and neck is raised to counterbalance the trailing hindquarters. The expression on the horse is not a happy one.*



*Figure 8-photo by Greg Johnstone- here is the 'rise phase' before correcting the rider's position and balance. There is quite a lot of downward pressure on the stirrup here. Again the horse's posture is the evidence of the rider's state of balance.*



*Figure 9- photo by Greg Johnstone-Now it is all looking and feeling better for the horse and the rider. Look at the softness in both the horse and the rider. Once the lower leg is corrected the rest of the body can come into balance. Again the horse's posture and the expression on his face tell the truth of the story. Look how far he is reaching through with his legs now!!!! Well done Elaine and Prince.*

So go and have fun experimenting with your rising trot. Until next time, Mel